DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 430 595 JC 990 260

AUTHOR	Daniel, John
TITLE	Lifelong Learning, Systematic Skepticism and Decent Democracy.
INSTITUTION	Open Univ., Milton Keynes (England).
PUB DATE	1999-04-00
NOTE	11p.; Keynote address presented at the Annual Conference of the National University Continuing Education Association (84th, Washington, DC, April 9-12, 1999.)
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Access to Education; *College Role; Continuing Education; *Distance Education; Educational Change; *Educational Technology; Foreign Countries; *Futures (of Society); *Higher Education; *Lifelong Learning; School Community Relationship
IDENTIFIERS	*Open University (Great Britain)

ABSTRACT

This keynote address discusses the implications of the university continuing education community. The paper asserts that while the boundaries of higher education have blurred in terms of physical buildings; the characteristics of students interested in higher education; the curricular offerings of high schools, community colleges, and universities; and the purposes of higher education institutions; a core purpose that involves enabling society to develop and maintain an understanding of itself and the world remains. Three areas of change for continuing education are suggested: examining and following the customer (student) care models effectively used by for-profit and corporate universities; more deeply examining the nature of knowledge; and making more explicit to students the academic mode of thinking are recounted. The four-pronged model of distance learning used by the Open University in order to illustrate the implications of incorporating change on individual students, the community and society is cited. It is concluded that by providing flexible, quality and low-cost education, mega-universities (that follow the distance learning model) are the institutions that will lead the future of university education. (SKF)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 430 595

Lifelong Learning, Systematic Skepticism and Decent Democracy

Sir John Daniel

Open University
Milton Keyes, England

JC 990 260

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
J. Daniel
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

National University Continuing Education Association

84th Annual Conference – April 9-12, 1999
Washington, DC

Blurring the Boundaries of the Academy

Keynote Address

Lifelong Learning, Systematic Skepticism and Decent Democracy

Sir John Daniel

Vice-Chancellor, The Open University (UK)
President, The Open University of the United States
(for related material see http://www.open.ac.uk/vcs-speeches/)

Introduction

It's a pleasure to be here in person. I say that because I took part in my last NUCEA event by video-link. That was a very interesting seminar on *Postbaccalaureate Futures* held last November in Aspen, Colorado. As someone who has devoted much of his career to distance learning I have to support the use of technology to expand the participation in events. However, there is always something special about being there. My colleague Alan Bassindale, who did attend the Aspen seminar in person, was snowed in there for 24 hours by a storm. You don't get that experience by video.

I congratulate you on the theme of this conference: *Blurring the Boundaries of the Academy*. It stimulates some interesting trains of thought. My plan is to travel those trains with issues facing university continuing education uppermost in my mind. This will lead me to make proposals about the ends and the means that you should pursue over the coming years.

To blur or not to blur? Is it good or bad to blur the boundaries of the academy? For someone now living in Britain blurring is bad. You will have heard of the political phenomenon called Tony Blair. Nearly two years into his mandate as Britain's prime minister Tony Blair still enjoys very high standing in the opinion polls although our vicious newspapers are beginning to find a few chinks in his armour and a few viruses to defeat his spin doctors. However this is still a highly frustrating time for the UK's political opposition. The honeymoon with the Blair government may be ending, but the opposition is still nowhere in the polls. One element of their frustration is that it's still not clear exactly what Tony Blair stands for. For this reason they have given him the nickname Tony Blur, and that is not meant to be a compliment.

The most celebrated aspect of the Blur of Blair is what we call the Third Way. This concept owes something to its rediscovery by the Clinton White House but Tony Blair is trying, so far with mixed success, to give it some serious intellectual underpinnings. The intention is to find a third way to run a modern country that is neither socialist nor capitalist. This search for the third way goes back to the governments of Pierre Trudeau in Canada in the 1970s and early 1980s. Indeed, I still think that Trudeau, who is probably the most intellectually powerful western politician of the last thirty years, did more to think through the third way than anyone has done since. However, lots of people are now trying because the 1990s have created a new political environment with the breaching of the Berlin Wall in Europe and the attenuation of *apartheid* in Africa.

Socialist is a busted flush. True Marxists may whine that neither the Soviet Union nor China really gave socialism a proper whirl, but most people think there is enough evidence to conclude that socialism is no way to run a society. Only a few years ago it looked as if capitalism now had the field to itself. Francis Fukayama proclaimed the end of history. Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan assumed that their neo-liberal agenda would live for at least a thousand years.

But there is clearly a problem. The right-wing neo-liberal agenda doesn't seem to be playing as well in Peoria as its promoters think it should, and that goes for most other parts of the world as well.

There is hardly a government of the right left in Europe, the right in Canada is in disarray and here in the United States the Democrats are doing better than the Republicans.

You didn't ask me here to push any homespun political philosophy but I do want to start by suggesting that we probably haven't reached the end of history or even the end of the history of political ideas. We should welcome the attempts by Bill Clinton, Tony Blair, George Bush, Gerhard Schröder and others to develop politics and policies. We know, of course, that a key purpose of exploring avenues like the Third Way and Compassionate Conservatism is to find the centre ground that most voters seem to like, but in a democracy there is nothing wrong with that.

Our duty in universities is to make the debate as honest as possible. In the old days, with the right rooting for enterprise and the left lobbying for equality we knew where we were. Today with both sides promoting the much vaguer concept of fairness there are more questions to ask.

What I shall explore this morning are some of the implications, for the university continuing education community, of the times we live in. I have taken as my title *Lifelong Learning, Systematic Skepticism, and Decent Democracy*. I hope you will apply some systematic skepticism to my conclusion, which I regard as tentative but I will give you in advance. It is that we may see a considerable reversal of roles between university continuing education and the core functions of the academy.

Blurred boundaries

Back to your theme. How have the boundaries of the academy been blurred?

Physical:
First, they have been blurred physically. When I was a student at Oxford the boundaries of the academy were made of stone. The gates of the colleges shut at midnight and if you were late you had to climb in over the wall. My own college, being a civilised sort of place, happened to have one student bedroom on the ground floor with a window onto the High Street so you could climb in without risk of injury. You just had to promise to buy a beer for the long-suffering student allocated to that room. His record was 52 people through his room in one night so he never paid for a drink in the college bar.

That kind of boundary is meaningless at the Open University and for many of you. My founding predecessor at the OU, Walter Perry, told the first staff to design the learning system for a lighthouse keeper off the Scottish coast. Today OU students are everywhere. 30,000 people are taking our courses outside the UK and we examined them in 111 countries last year. Last month I visited one of the Princes of Saudi Arabia in his palace and was told that members of his family were studying OU courses upstairs.

So the physical boundaries of the academy are increasingly meaningless, although that shouldn't deceive us into ignoring the cultural boundaries that exist between peoples. Don't swallow all the facile talk about the globalisation of the academy. For her book *Globalising Education* my colleague Robin Mason studied programmes from various countries that claimed to be international and found that few of them really were. In most cases they are programs designed for a national context that enroll a few students overseas. There's nothing wrong with that but let's call a spade a spade.

Clientele:
Second, the boundaries we used to draw around the clientele of students who attended university campuses, at least in respect to age profile, began to blur a long time ago. It's now a generation since the number of college students over 23 years old began to exceed the younger age group. Today university education involves the whole age range. At the Open University the bell curve of our age profile is becoming even flatter. We have always had the vast majority of our students in the 25-40 age bracket but the proportion at the extremes of the range is growing steadily. At last count we had 7,000 students over 60 and 800 over 80. Even more interestingly, the proportion of young students aged under 24 has grown by a factor of three in the last five years, even though we do not recruit in the high schools.

So lifelong learning is becoming a reality as well as a slogan. But have we taken on board the implications of lifelong learning for the university curriculum? Does lifelong learning mean more of the same for the rest of your life? Presumably not. However, if we are going to be dropping back into study throughout our lives that ought to affect what we do in our first years of university study.

Nearly forty years ago, when I was at Oxford University, few graduates, except those planning academic careers, expected to do higher degrees. They had completed undergraduate degrees that were academic rather than vocational in nature and the intellectual skills they had acquired were expected to last for their career and probably did. Subjects had diversified somewhat from the days when an undergraduate degree in classics was the preferred qualification for running the world's largest empire but that system was still recognisable. Graduates of my generation who did return to study mostly concentrated on more vocational subjects, like accountancy and the omnipresent MBA.

Today, the proportion of people continuing their education after the phase of compulsory schooling has grown enormously and this has changed the curriculum and blurred its boundaries.

Curricular:
The blurring of the curricular boundaries of the academy has two related elements. First, a high proportion of today's university students are doing vocational courses: business studies and information technology being two very popular lines. Second, and partly as a consequence, the distinctions between vocational curricula as between the last years of high school, the community colleges and the universities are increasingly blurred.

A good example of this is the courses that various IT companies run to train people for employment as users, operators or installers of their hardware or software. There is no question that those who complete these programs are very employable. How they fit into the traditional curricular structure is less clear.

Moral:
Fourth, let me suggest, at the risk of being misunderstood, that the moral boundaries of the campus are being blurred. I don't mean that university presidents are any more or less upright than they were half a century ago. I mean that our assumptions about the purpose of establishing and operating universities are becoming blurred. Until recently, even in the United States, where diversity is prized, universities have been run for altruistic reasons. The kings, queens, bishops, industrialists and merchants who endowed our older universities believed that education was a good thing and providing more opportunities for education was a noble act. No doubt they also wanted to erect monuments to themselves as they did so, but their motivation was primarily altruistic.

Later, as governments started funding universities, that motivation did not change fundamentally. The creation of the land-grant universities arose from a desire to bring the benefits of university teaching and research to society at large. This aim of public service continues to be a core purpose of universities. The Open University, which celebrates its thirtieth anniversary next month, has written into its Royal Charter the aim that it should 'promote the educational wellbeing of the community generally'.

Clearly the creation of for-profit universities is a major change to this tradition. It is too early to say how this new trend will develop. No doubt the current Wall Street enthusiasm for seeking profits from university education will dissipate, but whether it does or not, for-profit institutions certainly blur the moral boundaries of the academy.

Those are four ways in which the old boundaries of the academy are now blurred. Universities are physically dispersed; they teach all sorts and conditions of people; their curricula blend seamlessly with those of other levels and styles of education and training; and they serve a range of moral purposes. No doubt other sessions of this conference will identify various other dimensions on which it is now difficult to say where the academy begins and ends.

Searching for the core

But if we can't say where it begins and ends, we can perhaps identify where the core is and I now ask me to join you in that search. I realise that this is an unusual request at a meeting of leaders of

university continuing education. Usually you leave it to your more philosophical academic colleagues to follow in the footsteps of John Henry Newman while you get on with the practical business of supplying what the customers actually want.

I take you down this route because I believe that in the age of lifelong learning more customers than hitherto will want courses and programs that reflect the core purpose of universities as well as the bread and butter offerings that help them in their jobs.

Two years ago Britain concluded an enquiry into higher education under the leadership of Lord. Dearing. My colleague Diana Laurillard, whom some of you will know, was a member of his Committee of Enquiry. I found the Committee's work and her reflections on it very helpful in identifying the core of the university enterprise.

The Dearing Committee said that the role of universities is *'to enable society to maintain an independent understanding of itself and its world'*. Let's unpack that statement.

It focuses on **society**, not the nation, because this is a global world. University teaching can now cross national borders in the way that research has always done.

It talks about **maintaining** an understanding, not communicating an understanding, because things change, each society is in flux, theories evolve, understanding develops.

The definition talks about 'understanding **of itself**' because the understanding reached must be widely owned and disseminated. Understanding is not the preserve of an elite, but of a learning society.

The word **independent** is there to capture the unique role of universities as creators of understanding. In a knowledge society many claim the right to help us interpret and understand the world. However, most of those claimants: the media; industrial and government research centres; and the new breed of corporate universities; cannot be independent of commercial and political interests. The individualistic and disinterested nature of the true university remains unique.

Finally, **understanding** means going beyond information, it means going beyond knowledge, it means knowledge acquired with the sense of responsibility for how it comes to be known that can make it the foundation for action.

If that is the role of the university what must be the style of university learning? It must not stop at the transmission of information, nor at the communication of knowledge. It means the development of understanding. That is an iterative process involving a dialogue with oneself and others that moves toward a shared understanding. That shared understanding carries with it a critical distance leading eventually to a personal perspective from which learners take responsibility for what they know, how they came to know it and where they may properly apply it. Put another way, knowledge alone is insufficient, university education implies an understanding of the nature of knowledge.

We must recognise that on from this perspective much of what universities now do, and particularly what departments of continuing education do, is not university work.

I hasten to say that I do not blame you and I do not blame universities for this. Our societies have urged us to inculcate simple skills and to transmit well-codified knowledge and we have eagerly complied. Such activities have, however, obscured the core role of universities and encouraged a host of new players, who may well be better than established universities at teaching straightforward skills and knowledge, to call themselves universities and move into the field.

Looking at the wider economy of universities it is easy to be worried by these trends. Some universities have made their books balance by charging a mark-up for teaching some of the simple skills and well-codified knowledge in areas like business and IT that help the economy along. No-one pretends that this kind of teaching requires much independence of thought. Indeed, the individualistic and disinterested nature of the true university style may be a positive handicap.

However, lots of individuals and employers want this kind of teaching and most of our universities are supplying it.

Today various new providers are moving in to focus exclusively on that kind of teaching. In some jurisdictions these new suppliers are making inroads into enrolments at existing universities. Because they have a tight focus they do a good job within their frame of reference and have low overheads. Because universities have been overpriced the newcomers are able to make good profits. Because they had to prise open a market they have been very student-centred, giving students precedence over faculty when it comes to parking and similar revolutionary moves. They have made themselves distinctive. Some of them positively boast about the fact that they are little interested in the nature of knowledge, disinterested enquiry, independent thought and nourishment of teaching by research. But of course they are very eager to gain accreditation as universities.

How should we respond to this development once we've got over the stage of calling these newcomers by rude names: cherry pickers, cream skimmers or worse? Clearly we must use this development as an incentive for change. As he ruminates on the 20-year relationship between his North Central Association and the University of Phoenix Steve Crow concludes: 'The University of Phoenix is probably not the model of 21st century higher education, but it clearly is an important model for understanding how higher education can change'. I suggest three areas of change, in ascending order of challenge, that should be of interest to university continuing education.

The first is simple. If the for-profit, virtual and corporate universities are really providing better customer care and nuts-and-bolts services to students then there is a nice benchmark for us to match. That is not rocket science nor an affront to our academic dignity.

Second, if we believe what we preach about independent thought, understanding the nature of knowledge and the important of discourse between students and active researchers then we should apply that. I mean apply it even – perhaps particularly – in those areas of the curriculum where we have slipped into contenting ourselves with basic knowledge and skills transfer.

It happens that I am presently on the receiving end of an attempt to do that and I'm enjoying it. Allow me a short digression. I've been a student for most of my career. One of the advantages of heading a distance teaching university is that you can take courses from your own university without embarrassing anyone by having the president show up in class. This year I'm taking a Web-based course entitled *T171 You, Your Computer and the Net*. I'm doing it for two reasons. First I expect that it will make me a more sophisticated and confident user of the technologies I use every day – and slightly less dependent on my office staff when I get stuck. Second, it enables me to sample the kind of service we give to students and, in this case, to assess for myself the pros and cons of Web-based learning.

I'm six weeks into this 36-week course and have just submitted my first assignment. It's going well. My major surprise has been how much I'm required to think. Indeed it was only after several weeks that I noticed the course had the subtitle *Learning and Living in the Information Age*. The course takes seriously the fact that e-mail and computer conferences are new forms of human interaction and so we study some of the relevant literature on transactions. It also assumes that that noisy information environment that is the World Wide Web requires its users to have the skills to sift and assess information and its sources so the course trains us in that too. Furthermore, the course insists that technologies come with a history and makes us study the history of the PC and the Net in order to understand how we got to where we are today.

It would be perfectly possible to teach a course called *You, Your Computer and the Net*, even in a university, and be content with showing people how to use the hardware and software while throwing in some tips about good practice. As a university student, however, I find it appropriate that my course is subtitled *Learning and Living in the Information Age* and obliges me to think critically about the role and impact of this technology. Unfortunately I can't tell you how the course has gone over with students generally because this is the first presentation. It is a pilot presentation limited to only 750 students but I'm sure it will do well when the enrolments climb into the thousands next year.

The third area of change grows out of that example but has more far-reaching implications. I believe that there is now a major role for continuing education in exposing its students much more explicitly

to the academic mode of thinking than we have done before. I believe further that doing that will be a very important contribution to the betterment of society in the next century.

That's rather sweeping, so let me explain further and cite the evidence from the Open University that inspires this line of thinking. Two years ago Britain conducted a major survey of graduates with the aim of trying to define a concept called *graduateness*. The basic question was: how is someone changed by doing a university degree? Graduates from all universities were included in the sample and, not surprisingly, the results did not differ greatly from institution to institution, except in one case. Graduates from the Open University, much more than graduates from elsewhere, said that university study had changed their lives.

At first I found that finding odd. After all, the average age of OU students on entry is 34 so you would think their lives had achieved a degree of stability. Comments about not being able to teach old dogs new tricks come to mind. Conversely, you might think that the young, malleable students who study full-time after high school would be changed by the experience of university. No doubt they are, but they are much less aware of it than our older OU students because it is mixed in with the general process of maturation.

How do Open University graduates say that study has changed them? Like all graduates they find that the degree has made them more employable. However, our mature students give greater importance to personal development than to employability. The American author Patricia Lunneborg has written two books, *OU Women* and *OU Men*, based on in-depth interviews with Open University graduates. They mention new careers, better job opportunities, more self-confidence, a sense of achievement, more opportunities in life and new friends as the results of their studies.

I particularly appreciated the man who told her, with a mixture of satisfaction and exasperation, that ever since doing a degree with the Open University he couldn't see less than six sides to any question. That is what it is all about, the inculcation of the academic mode of thinking that makes hypotheses and the development of the systematic skepticism that examines the evidence. As young students gravitate increasingly to vocationally related courses and approach their university experience with more utilitarian and instrumental attitudes they may graduate with little proficiency in the academic mode of thinking and an attitude of credulity to authority rather than systematic skepticism.

On the evidence I've given it may be somewhat later, as lifelong learners, that they become mature students in both senses of the term: ready to seek understanding; more alert to the nature of knowledge; open to a discourse about what can be known.

Each year, at our twenty-five commencement ceremonies, many thousands of Open University graduates comment to me individually about their studies. A surprising number do second, third and even fourth baccalaureate degrees. I've often heard the comment, 'I'm now studying properly what I only did superficially as a young student doing my first degree'.

You get my drift. University education, in its fullest sense, may well be wasted on the young. It is only later, as minds are matured by life experience, that they are ready for real university study. That gives continuing education a more prominent role than it has claimed in the past in promoting fundamental academic values.

But there is more. There is evidence that university study as a mature person makes a proportion of people more likely to get involved in the life of the wider community. I expect that Open University data is typical. 46% of our graduates report an enhanced interest in current affairs, reading non-fiction and watching more serious TV programs. 40% said that as a result of their studies they had become more interested in helping people in need. 20% had become more involved in cultural activities. 10% had become more involved in political activities. The implication is, of course, that the behaviour and interests of the majority of graduates do not change on these dimensions. But that's fine, we are talking about education, not brainwashing.

Nevertheless, those who change are substantial minorities. Those percentages, applied to an OU graduating class exceeding 10,000 each year, are a contribution to a more cohesive society that becomes very significant if you add in similar proportions of the mature graduates from all

universities. This assumes, of course, that engagement with the wider community is a good thing, but I plead guilty to that charge. A future where we simply live and move nervously in and between the electronic security of our separate gated communities, be they smart condominiums, prisons, universities or office buildings, is not one that appeals to me.

Thomas Jefferson, who is arguably the greatest public figure that the modern world has produced – despite arguments about his sex life that seem to go with the territory for American presidents – said that humanity divides into two groups. There are those who fear and distrust the people and those who identify with the people and have confidence in them. It makes me proud that one product of Open University study is numbers of graduates who identify with the people and do something about it in the Jeffersonian tradition.

Those who have confidence in the people have always argued that consciousness is the key to improvements in the human condition. However, our power structures usually see the consciousness of the citizenry as a danger which must be lulled and channelled towards the inoffensive and superficial. We each have our views on where to raise the consciousness of our fellow citizens. The point of producing graduates who engage with the community is not to channel its concerns in a particular direction but to encourage the general civic consciousness that is the foundation for decent democracy.

For me a persuasive analysis is that of the Canadian author John Ralston Saul. In his book *Voltaire's Bastards: The Dictatorship of Reason in the West* he argues that since the Enlightenment we have perverted the use of reason by confusing it with technocratic expertise. We have become a society that wants instant answers from experts to each new question. Saul argues that a mature society should often prefer to live in doubt than to put its faith in such instant answers. I hope that my Open University graduate who cannot see less than six sides to any question will contribute to a society that is comfortable with doubt.

In that respect such graduates, whether from the Open University or from your programs of continuing education, can provide a vital counterweight to the false certainties of the experts. Saul recalls that for the Romans *sensus communis* meant humanity and sensibility as well as common sense. Our more restricted use of the term common sense is, as he puts it, 'the narrowing effect of a civilization which seeks automatically to divide through answers when our desperate need is to unify the individual through questions'.

I said that I would talk about ends and means. I hope that those comments about the superior qualities of mature graduates have blurred the boundaries of your thinking about the mission of continuing education. What about the means of producing them?

Supported Open Learning

The Open University operates on the basis of a model of distance education that it calls *Supported Open Learning*. It has four key ingredients: 1) excellent learning materials; 2) individual academic support to each student; 3) effective administration and logistics; and 4) teaching rooted in research. The world's largest distance teaching universities, which I have written about elsewhere as the *mega-universities*, owe their considerable success to these principles of supported open learning which they have introduced with appropriate local variants. By operating flexibly at large scale, with low costs and with good quality, the mega-universities have created a revolution in higher education.

How should the mega-universities, how should all universities react to the new technological forces of change? The response should recognize that these forces present threats to universities as well as opportunities. What are they?

First, new technology makes it easier to access information. But remember that university teaching is much more than this.

Second, technology tends to drive the curriculum towards skills rather than knowledge and understanding.

Third, technology is best exploited by teams whereas universities emphasize the creativity of the individual academic.

What is the best response to the opportunities and the most effective answer to the threats posed by technology? I distinguish first between hard technologies and soft technologies. Hard technologies are bits and bytes, electrons and pixels, satellites and search engines. Soft technologies are processes, approaches, sets of rules and models of organisation.

My key conclusion is that if you want to use the hard technologies for university-level teaching and learning that is both intellectually powerful and competitively cost-effective then you must concentrate on getting the soft technologies right

These technologies are simply the working practices that underpin the rest of today's modern industrial and service economy: division of labour, specialisation, teamwork and project management. But these are not the traditional working practices of universities. Although universities specialise and divide labour as between disciplines, the habit in teaching is for the same individual to do everything: develop the curriculum; organise the learning resources; teach the class; provide academic support; and assess student learning.

This robust, cottage-industry model does not require much organisation. However, it also does not allow us to reconfigure the eternally challenging triangle of cost-access-quality in the directions of lower costs, greater access and higher quality.

The mega-universities have been able to reconfigure that eternal triangle and we should look to them for inspiration. Their achievements are remarkable. Costs per student are significantly lower than those of conventional universities in the same country. They have expanded access dramatically – the dozen mega-universities enrol over three million students between them. They are steadily gaining a reputation for quality. Last year, for instance, the Open University achieved a maximum score of 24/24 in the UK's national teaching assessment scheme for its teaching of General Engineering and was the only university to achieve this. Cambridge had to be satisfied with 23/24.

The mega-universities have achieved this feat by adopting the soft technologies of modern enterprise that I listed. Division of labour means that some people develop learning materials, others support students, yet others provide logistic support and so on.

Division of labour means specialisation, and this enables the university to focus special training and resources on each function. For example, the Open University spends at least two million dollars annually on training its 7,000 associate lecturers who provide support to individual students. They become highly skilled at that task and very dedicated to their students.

Once you have division of labour and specialisation then teamwork is necessary if you want the whole to be greater than the sum of the parts. But experience also shows that when academics develop courses in teams the outcome is superior, in both academic and pedagogical terms, to what an individual could do alone. This is because the work of the course team is a splendid example of the development of understanding through systematic skepticism.

The course team engages in an iterative process which involves academics and other professionals in a dialogue that moves toward a shared understanding. Instead of simply repackaging the current scholarly orthodoxy this process moves the academic paradigms forward. I cite a new Open University course, *Understanding Cities*, as a good example of this. In teaching students how to think about the mega-cities that will dominate the world in the next century, the course team found it needed radically to revise the standard thinking about cities. The impact of this work will be felt across the whole international academic community and not just by the few thousand students who will take the course.

Finally, division of labour, specialisation and teamwork all require project management. The university itself has to take responsibility for seeing that it all hangs together.

How do I sum all this up? Very simply. Success in the coming era requires a radical change of focus. The tradition in universities is that the individual teacher teaches. The future is that the university teaches.

This may be a radical change of focus but it does actually take us back to the roots of universities in medieval times. If the future reinforces the notion of a community of scholars acting collectively to enable society to maintain an independent understanding of itself and its world that will be progress.

References

Crow, Steve (1998) Ruminations on the Commission's Relationships with the University of Phoenix, unpublished essay.

Daniel, John S (1996) *Mega-Universities and Knowledge Media: Technology Strategies for Higher Education*, Kogan Page, London

Laurillard, Diana (1990) New Technologies, Students and the Curriculum: The Impact of C&IT on Higher Education, to be published

Lunneborg, Patricia (1994) *OU Women: Undoing Educational Obstacles*, Cassell, London

Lunneborg, Patricia (1997) *OU Men: Working Through Lifelong Learning*, Lutterworth, Cambridge

Mason, Robin (1998) *Globalising Education*, Routledge

Saul, John Ralston (1992) Voltaire's Bastards: The Dictatorship of Reason in the West, Penguin